

SCENIC HIGHWAY ELEMENT of the General Plan

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city of san luis obispo

Adopted
September
1983

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Panorama of Morros from Foothill Boulevard

A. AUTHORITY AND PURPOSE

Since 1971, Section 65302(h) of the California Government Code requires all cities and counties in the state to prepare and adopt:

A scenic highway element for the development, establishment, and protection of scenic highways pursuant to the provisions of Article 2.5 (commencing with section 260) of Chapter 2 of Division 1 of the Streets and Highways Code.

The initial purpose of the state law was to ensure that community plans identified segments of state highways that met criteria for becoming official scenic routes. (To gain official scenic highway status, a request must be submitted by the local agency to the Director of the Department of Transportation for approval.)

However, many communities do not have state highways that meet the criteria for official designation. Therefore, this Scenic Highways Element, like many others, focuses on the scenic importance of local roads and spells out policies and programs that can preserve or improve their scenic qualities.

This Scenic Highways Element is one of the 9 required parts of the San Luis Obispo General Plan.

B. INTRODUCTION

1. The Setting

San Luis Obispo is located mid-way between the Los Angeles and San Francisco metropolitan areas. It is the County Seat and the focus of government employment within the county. California Polytechnic State University, adjoining the city to the north, is the community's largest employer with retail trades and tourism making up other important parts of the city's economic base.

Three State Highways bisect San Luis Obispo: Highway 1 begins in the City and provides access to the City of Morro Bay, Hearst Castle, and the Big Sur coastline; to the southeast, Highway 227 connects San Luis Obispo with the City of Arroyo Grande via the Edna Valley; US Highway 101 is the principal coastal freeway route, dividing the City and providing access north over the Cuesta Grade.

2. Definitions

The following terms, as used in this element, are defined below:

- a. Scenic Highway: A major street or segment of a street that provides people--primarily traveling in motor vehicles--with views of important scenic resources.
- b. Major Street: Highway 101, Highway 1, Highway 227 and all thoroughfares and arterial streets shown on the San Luis Obispo Circulation Element Map (as amended).

- c. Important Scenic Resources: Laguna Lake, San Luis Obispo and Stenner Creeks, the Santa Lucia, Davenport, and Irish Foothills, Cuesta Ridge, the Morros (including Bishop Peak, Cerro San Luis Obispo and Islay Hill) and South Street Hill.
- d. Vista: a point from which several important scenic resources can be viewed.
- e. View: the ability to see an important scenic resource from a moving vehicle on a major street.
- f. Viewshed: the area that can be seen from a scenic highway.

3. Relationship to Other General Plan Elements

The Scenic Highway Element is most closely related to the Land Use and Circulation Elements. The Land Use Element establishes policies and programs which protect the important scenic resources mentioned above. The Hillside Planning section of the Land Use Element (section D) specifically addresses preservation issues.

The Circulation Element spells out how city streets should be used within the urban reserve--the maximum extent of future community growth. It provides a classification system for all major streets.

Highways, thoroughfares, or arterial streets either pass people through the community or allow people to travel from one part of town to another. It is views from these types of streets that this element focuses on.



Santa Lucia Mountains create a natural backdrop around the city.

C. THE SCENIC HIGHWAY SURVEY

Scenic Highways are shown on the map on the following page. Segments of the city's arterial street system are included along with parts of Highway 101 and Highway 227.

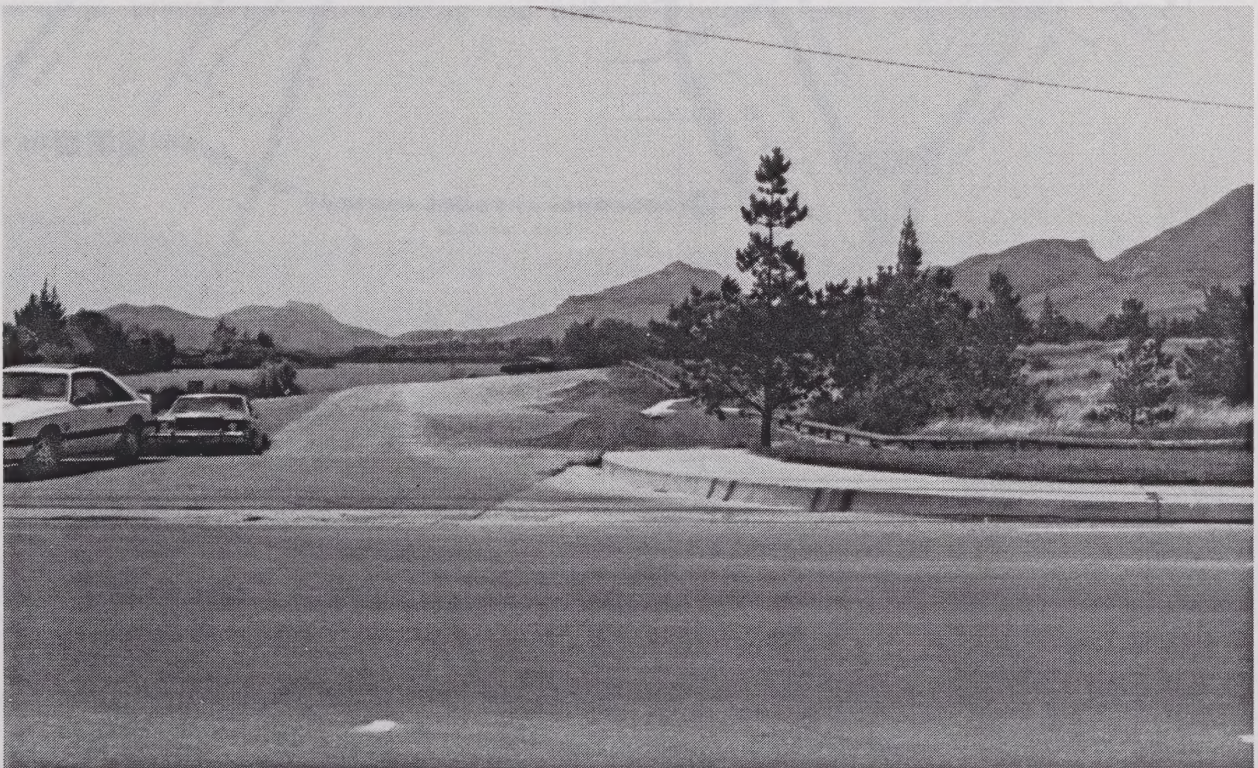
To prepare these maps city planners conducted extensive field studies. Three primary factors were analyzed:

First, the value of each scenic resource was determined. This required judgement, however, most people would agree that some parts of the landscape are more scenic--or "valuable"--than others. For example, the rock face of Bishop Peak is more dramatic than the smooth-textured slopes of South Street Hill.

Second, the extent of views from each major street segment was mapped. For example, there are areas that offer panoramic views of the City (such as Johnson Avenue at Bishop Street looking north) while others offer views of only a small part of the landscape (such as Chorro Street north of Highway 101).

Third, the length of time that a view is available was determined. Remember, the Scenic Highways Element is generally concerned with views from moving vehicles. Some last only a few seconds (a glimpse) while others are of longer duration and allow more enjoyment.

It was the evaluation of these three factors that resulted in the designation of certain streets as scenic highways. (For a more detailed explanation of survey techniques and rating systems, see the appendix of this report.)



Parks and open spaces enhance and protect dramatic views along major city streets.



NO SCALE

DESIGNATED SCENIC HIGHWAYS



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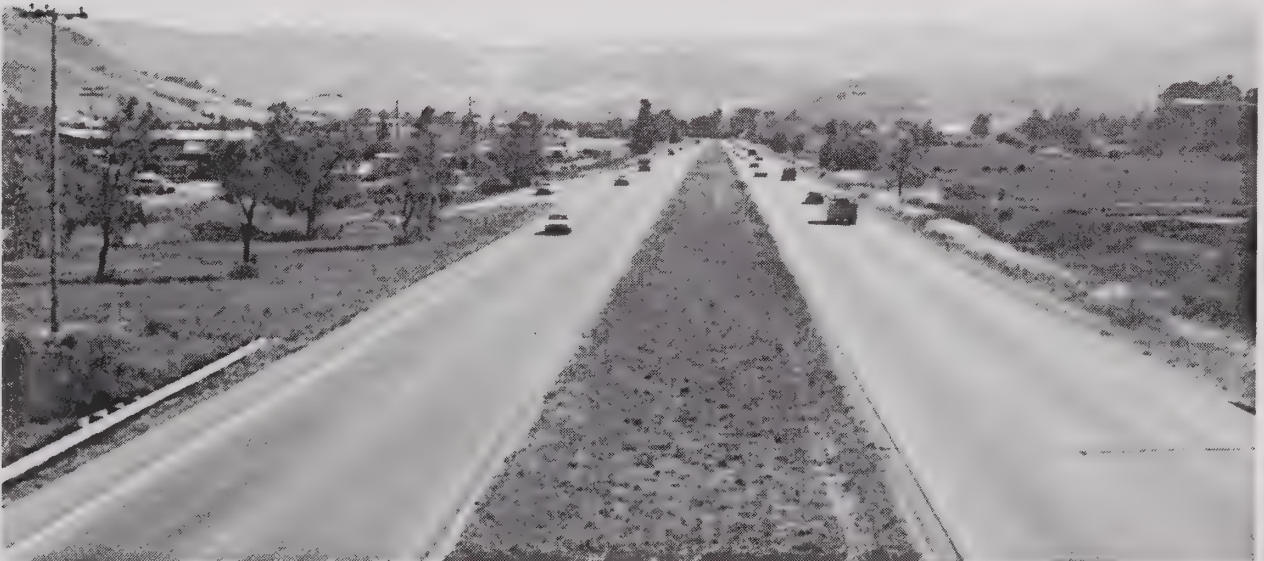
- V** VISTA
- ROADS OF HIGH OR MODERATE SCENIC VALUE OUTSIDE THE SAN LUIS OBISPO CITY LIMIT
- ROADS OF MODERATE SCENIC VALUE
- ===== ROADS OF HIGH SCENIC VALUE

D. BASIC GOAL

Views of important scenic resources from major streets should be preserved and improved to the maximum extent possible.



Vistas, like this from Los Osos Valley Road at U.S. Highway 101, provide travelers interesting and unique views in many directions.



POLICIES & PROGRAMS

E. POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

To reach the overall goal of preserving views from Scenic Highways, the city will pursue the following:

1. Policy: Private Area Development

Development along Scenic Highways should not block views or detract from the quality of the views.

Programs:

- a. Sensitive Sites: The Community Development Director may designate land in the viewshed of a Scenic Highway as "sensitive" and require architectural review of the development.
- b. Development Review: The Architectural Review Commission or Planning Commission should not approve projects which wall off Scenic Highways and block views. When reviewing the plans of individual projects, the ARC or Planning Commission should review adjoining projects to ensure that key views are maintained.
- c. Environmental Review: The City may consider the total or partial blocking of a view along a Scenic Highway as a "significant environmental impact". Mitigation measures, in the form of alternative site plans or building designs, will be required when visual impacts are judged to be significant.
- d. Sign Controls: All freestanding signs on properties adjoining Scenic Highways, that are allowed by the city's sign regulations, must be approved by the Architectural Review Commission. Low-profile and low-contrast signs will be considered more appropriate in these areas.



Hillsides should not be "walled off" from view by large-scale development near the street.

2. Policy: Use of Scenic Highway Corridors

The City and other public and semi-public agencies will avoid cluttering Scenic Highways with utility and circulation-related equipment and facilities.

Programs:

- a. Sign Consolidation: Whenever possible, signs should be attached to a single low-profile standard or to related facilities such as bus shelters. Key scenic routes should be signed.
- b. Utility Undergrounding: As part of any new development project along a Scenic Highway, utilities (such as telephone, electric and cable TV lines) should be installed underground.

When other factors are equal, undergrounding districts should first be established along Scenic Highways. The City will reevaluate its district priorities to determine whether changes need to be made.

- c. Street Landscaping: The placement of landscaping and street trees should not block views from Scenic Highways. Clustering of trees or allowing them to be planted farther back in front yards should be considered as an alternative to uniform spacing. The street landscaping should add to the Scenic Highway experiences.
- d. Street Lights: Street lights should be low scale and focus light at intersections where it is most needed. Tall, "cobra type," light standards should be avoided. Street lighting should be integrated with other street furniture at locations where views are least disturbed. However, safety priorities should remain superior to scenic concerns.
- e. Traffic Signals: Low-profile signals with integrated switching devices should be used. Mast arms for hanging signals over intersections should be avoided. However, safety priorities should remain superior to scenic concerns.

3. Policy: State Designation of Official Scenic Routes

Highway 101 within San Luis Obispo should be designated as an official Scenic Highway by the California Department of Transportation (CalTrans). It is an entry-way to the community and exposes travelers to broad scenic vistas.

Programs:

- a. Corridor Enhancement: The city will carry out a program to protect and enhance the Highway 101 corridor. Parts of this program are described in the preceding policy sections. Other parts are included in the city's sign regulations and architectural review procedures and guidelines. Key parts of the program include the following:

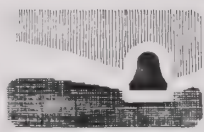
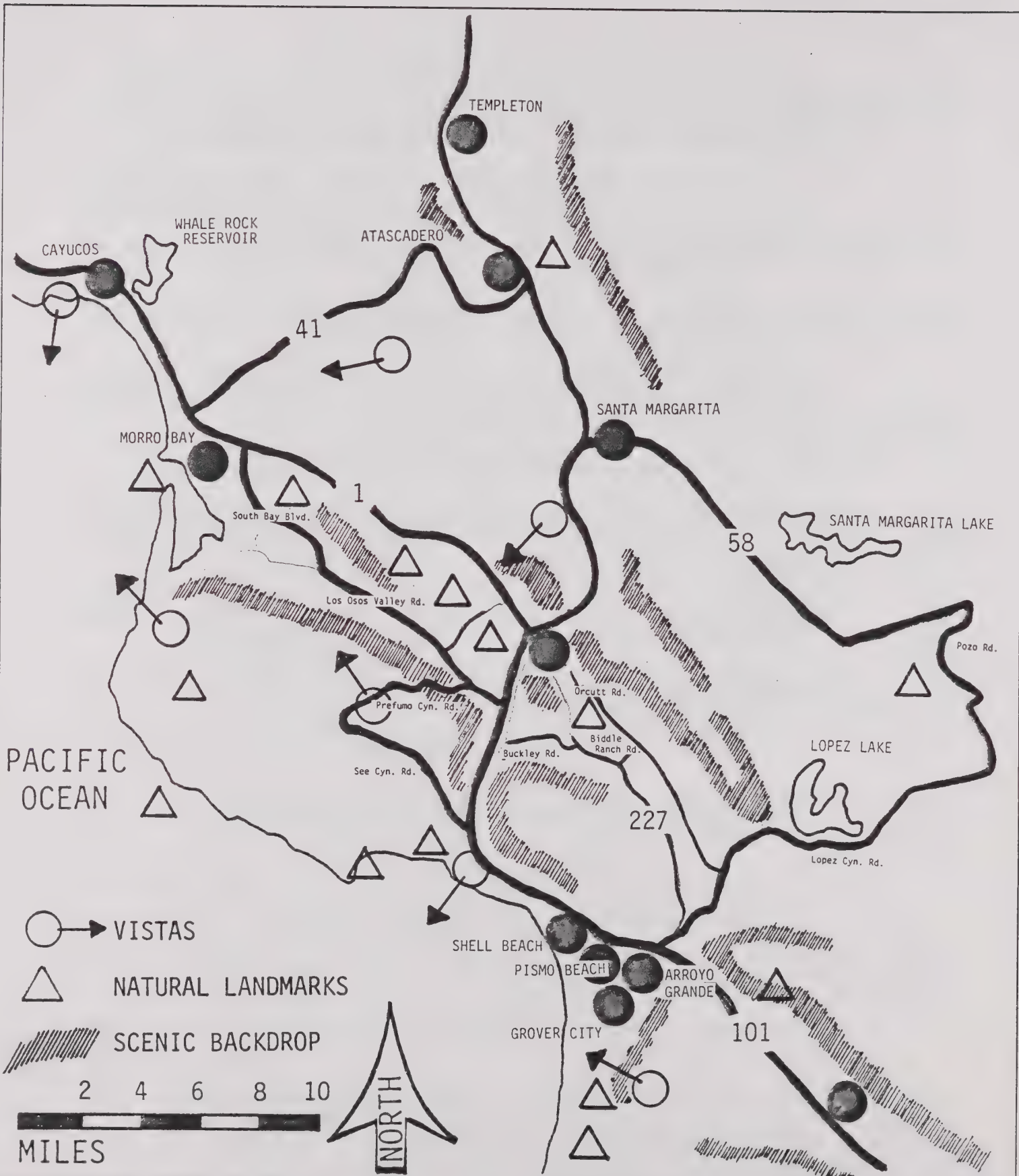
- (1) Regulation of land use (Land Use Element and ARC Guidelines).
 - (2) Review of all site plans of new projects (ARC Guidelines).
 - (3) Control to the legal extent possible the location and design of outdoor advertising (Sign Regulations and ARC Guidelines).
 - (4) Control of grading and landscaping (Grading Regulations and ARC Guidelines).
 - (5) Control the design of structures and equipment (ARC Guidelines)
- b. Application for Designation: The City will apply to the California Department of Transportation (CalTrans) for official designation of Highway 101 as a scenic route.

4. Policy: Protection of Scenic Highways in Adjoining County Areas

The county government should protect and enhance Scenic Highways that connect San Luis Obispo with other communities and recreation areas.

Programs:

- a. Adopt Element: The county should adopt a Scenic Highways Element following the provisions of the California Government Code.
- b. Designation of Scenic Highways: The county should designate the following routes as Scenic Highways:
 - (1) Highway 101 from Cuesta Ridge to the Avila Hot Springs off ramp.
 - (2) Highway 1 from Highland Drive to the South Bay Boulevard off ramp.
 - (3) Highway 227 from Buckley Road to the City of Arroyo Grande.
 - (4) Orcutt Road from Johnson Avenue to Lopez Canyon Road.
 - (5) Los Osos Valley Road from San Luis Obispo to the Los Osos Urban Reserve Line.
 - (6) Foothill Boulevard from San Luis Obispo west to Los Osos Valley Road.
 - (7) Buckley Road from South Higuera Street to Highway 227.
 - (8) Biddle Ranch Road from Highway 227 to Orcutt Road.
- c. Official State Designation: The county should take the necessary actions to request the designation of portions of Highways 101, 1, and 227 as Official Scenic Routes.



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Department of Community Development

990 Palm Street/Post Office Box 321, San Luis Obispo, CA 93406

SAN LUIS OBISPO REGION

d. City Advocacy: The city staff and City Council will promote the creation of Scenic Highways in adjoining county areas. This support can happen when:

- (1) Reviewing draft county general plan elements or major revisions to them.
- (2) Reviewing changes to the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) as a member agency of the San Luis Obispo County Council of Governments.
- (3) Reviewing development projects that are referred to the city that are located along routes listed in section 4.b. of this element.

F. ADMINISTRATION AND INTERPRETATION

The San Luis Obispo Community Development Department is responsible for administering the provisions of this element. The Community Development Director is responsible for interpreting all policies, programs and map designations contained in this element. Appeals of the Director's actions can be made to the Planning Commission.

This element can be amended three times each year consistent with section 9606.1 of the San Luis Obispo municipal code. Deadlines for General Plan Amendment applications are March 15, July 15, and November 15 each year.

APPENDIX

DETAILS OF PROCEDURES

1. Master Plan

Routes were originally included in the Master Plan as a result of public hearings being held throughout the State. New routes can be added to the Master Plan by action of the State Legislature.

The Scenic Highway Advisory Committee shall be requested to review the proposed route and to make a recommendation for its inclusion into the Master Plan prior to having the Legislature include the route into the Master Plan.

2. Corridor Survey and Highway Facility Study

Following the request by the local jurisdiction, the District Scenic Highway Coordinator will coordinate and conduct the survey and study. The two will be combined into the Scenic Highway Report. The Report will contain maps, photographs, and descriptions showing:

- a. Suggested scenic highway corridor boundaries; (The corridor is defined as the area of land generally adjacent to and visible from the highway which requires protective measures to insure perpetuation of its scenic qualities.).

- b. Scenic elements within the suggested corridor.
- c. The relationship of the roadway to its surrounding environment.
- d. Proposed realignments or improvements of the route.
- e. Potential locations of roadside rests, vista points, and areas for public or commercial information sites.

The Scenic Highway Report will be prepared in cooperation with the local jurisdiction. The local jurisdiction, at the earliest possible time, should solicit the help and advice of local citizens' committees, affected property owners, conservation groups, and anyone else who might be interested in the proposed designation. With the input from these groups, the local jurisdiction and the District Scenic Highway Coordinator should review the route in the field and establish mutually acceptable corridor boundaries. It is very important to involve the previously mentioned groups as early as possible in order to afford them ample time for review and comment before official action is taken. This will

result in not only a corridor which meets the desires of the local residents but could reduce the possibility of any last minute controversy.

In instances where the Division of Highways proposes to realign or relocate a State highway that is an eligible scenic route, the District Director will have responsibility for initiating a preliminary corridor survey as part of the normal route study required for the realigned section. Eligibility for designation will then transfer to the new alignment at which time the jurisdiction may proceed with its planning studies that will result in designation of the new route as an Official Scenic Highway.

3. Local Jurisdiction's Plan and Program

The procedure for achieving official designation of scenic highways includes the requirement that local jurisdictions adopt a plan and program to protect and enhance the scenic appearance of the corridor. The minimum requirements which must be met by the local jurisdiction include, but are not limited to (1) regulation of land use which may include density and/or the intensity of development; (2) detailed land and site planning; (3) control of outdoor

advertising; (4) careful attention to and control of earthmoving and landscaping; and (5) the design and appearance of structures and equipment. The involvement of local citizens in determining the above five items is very important if the program is to have popular support.

See Appendix A for an example of a local jurisdiction's program. It should be emphasized that this plan and program is a guide only, and portions of it may not apply to all jurisdictions.

4. Designation by Director of the Department of Transportation

Whenever the Department determines that the corridor protection program for any State highway in the State Scenic Highway System has been implemented by the local governmental agency, and upon written request of the local jurisdiction for designation, and upon review and recommendation of the Scenic Highway Advisory Committee, the Department shall designate the highway as an Official State Scenic Highway and shall so indicate the highway in any publications of the Department or in any maps which

are issued by the Department to the public.

The Department shall cause appropriate signs to be placed and maintained along the portions of the State Scenic Highway System which the Department has designated as Official State Scenic Highways that indicated that the highways are Official State Scenic Highways.

The local jurisdiction's request for designation should be in the form of a written communication containing a brief descriptive report of the adopted measures or policies for plan implementation together with a zone map of this corridor area. The request will be reviewed by the Scenic Highway Advisory Committee for their recommendation prior to being submitted to the Director for his approval.

SUMMARY OF METHODOLOGY

Preparing the Scenic Highway Element started with identifying the community's scenic resources. These include the surrounding hillsides and the Morros, which control the form of the city and provide San Luis Obispo with a scenic landscape backdrop, and major creeks, such as San Luis Obispo, Stenner and Old Garden Creek which add a unique quality to the city's neighborhoods and downtown commercial areas.

After the key scenic resources were identified, views of the hillsides and creeks from the city's major streets were mapped. All arterial streets and thoroughfares, as shown on the city's Circulation Element Map, were studied. These streets handle the most traffic and therefore afford the greatest number of people driving cars views of the surrounding hillsides, the Chorro, Los Osos and Edna Valleys and the creeks.

Once the field observations were completed, a numeric ranking was given to each location. This number was then translated into the High, Moderate and Low quality of view classifications used throughout this element.



DESIGNATED SCENIC HIGHWAYS



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		VISTA
22-42		ROADS OF HIGH OR MODERATE SCENIC VALUE OUTSIDE THE SAN LUIS OBISPO CITY LIMIT
43-63		ROADS OF MODERATE SCENIC VALUE
		ROADS OF HIGH SCENIC VALUE

MAP OF VISUAL RESOURCES

1. Identify the visual resources.
2. Conduct field investigations:
 - A. identify thoroughfares and arterial streets (Circulation Element);
 - B. designate points of view along each street;
 - C. record observations.
3. Transfer field observations onto a worksheet and assign valences to each visual unit.
4. Multiply good or fair or poor (3,2,1) views by major or minor (2,1) assessments.

GOOD (3)		MAJOR visual unit (2)	
FAIR (2)	X	or	= 1-6
POOR (1)		MINOR visual unit (1)	
5. Sum the products for each point to determine a visual index value at each point.
6. Calculate the statistical mean, median, and mode.
7. Categorize the visual quality index numbers into HIGH, MODERATE, and LOW classifications.
8. Map the Scenic Highways with a HIGH or MODERATE classification.

NOTES

SCENIC HIGHWAYS ELEMENT numeric evaluation sheet		map designation values
PART		
LOCATION	ELEMENT	
	Cerro San Luis Obispo (4)	1
	peak/treeline (2)	1a
	base (1)	1b
	outcrop at base (1)	1c
	Bishop Peak (3)	2
	peak /treeline (2)	2a
	base (1)	2b
	Chumash Peak (3)	3
	peak/treeline (2)	3a
	base (1)	3b
	Santa Lucia Mountains (2)	4
	Santa Lucia Foothills (2)	5
	Irish Hills (2)	6
	Islay Hill (2)	7
	South Street Hill (1)	8
	Terrace Hill (1)	9
	Radio Hill (1)	10
	Davenport Hills (1)	11
	Orcutt Knob (1)	12
	* SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS *	*
	Laguna Lake (2)	13
SCENIC		
TOTAL		

RESOLUTION NO 5217 (1983 Series)

A RESOLUTION OF THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO
ADOPTING A SCENIC HIGHWAY ELEMENT OF THE GENERAL PLAN

WHEREAS, Section 65302(h) of the California Government Code directs all cities and counties to prepare a General Plan Scenic Highway Element; and

WHEREAS, the Community Development Director reviewed the draft Scenic Highway Element, determined that its adoption and implementation will not have a significant adverse effect on the environment, and on July 13, 1983 granted it a negative declaration; and

WHEREAS, in accordance with the provisions of state law, the Planning Commission held an advertised public hearing on July 27, 1983 to review and consider the Director's environmental determination and the draft Scenic Highway Element; and

WHEREAS, after receiving public testimony, the Planning Commission approved the negative declaration for the project, reviewed the content of the draft Scenic Highway Element, and forwarded the element to the City Council with a recommendation for adoption; and

WHEREAS, at an advertised public hearing the City Council reviewed the draft Scenic Highway Element recommended by the Planning Commission and found that its adoption is both timely and necessary to complete the city's General Plan.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED BY the Council of the City of San Luis Obispo as follows:

- (1) The Scenic Highway Element of the City of San Luis Obispo General Plan, as required by California Government Code Section 65302(h) is adopted. The text of the said adopted element is attached hereto as Exhibit "A".
- (2) Adoption and implementation of the Scenic Highway Element will not have an adverse effect on the environment.
- (3) The Community Development Department shall publish and make available to the public the element and shall distribute copies to appropriate agencies and local libraries.



Resolution No. 5217 (1983 Series)
Page 2

(3) The adoption of this element shall take effect thirty (30) days from the date of adoption of this resolution.

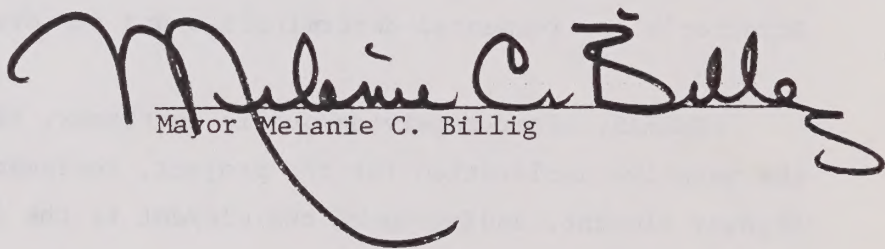
On motion of Councilman Settle, seconded by Councilman Griffin,
and on the following roll call vote:

AYES: Councilmembers Settle, Griffin, Dunin and Mayor Billig

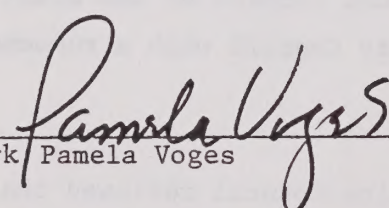
NOES: Councilwoman Dovey

ABSENT: None

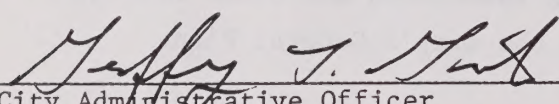
the foregoing resolution was passed and adopted this 6th day of September,
1983.

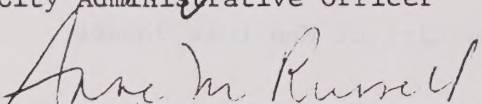

Mayor Melanie C. Billig

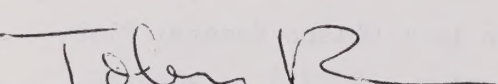
ATTEST:


City Clerk Pamela Voges

APPROVED:


City Administrative Officer


City Attorney


Community Development Director

